

**Murder at Mount Cuthbert: a Russian revolutionary describes Queensland life in
1915-1919.**

The short story translated below constitutes a rare example of social commentary by a Russian observer on the working classes of Australia, their attitudes and prejudices, in the early years of the federated Commonwealth of Australia. It is, of course, coloured by the firm political convictions of its author, Aleksandr Zuzenko (1884-1938), a sailor who had been imprisoned in Russia as a Socialist Revolutionary for his part in the revolution of 1905 and was a confirmed anarchist when he arrived in Australia in November 1911. He would spend the next seven and a half years in Australia, mostly in Queensland, finding labouring jobs where he could, while promoting the cause of the Industrial Workers of the World (IWW), and eventually assuming a leading role in the militant Union of Russian Workers (URW), based in Brisbane. For fomenting worker unrest and demonstrations, and for publishing illegal newspapers, he was deported to Odessa in 1919, but this was not the end of his involvement in Australian political life. No sooner had he reached Moscow than he joined the victorious Bolshevik faction of the former Social Democratic Party, arranged employment for himself as an operative of the newly formed Communist International, and in this capacity set out on an extended return mission to Australia with the aim of welding its infant Communist Party into a cohesive revolutionary force. This epic journey ended with his second deportation to Soviet Russia, which he reached in January 1923. His writings from that period, some of them long hidden in the files of the Comintern or disguised by pseudonyms in newspapers, have

lately been coming to light. His “Law of the Fang and the Cudgel” (below), hitherto unpublished, dates from this period of his life.

The story of Zuzenko’s travels as an agent of the Comintern (1920-23), his later voyages as a sea captain, and his execution as a ‘British spy’ during Stalin’s purges, has been recounted elsewhere.¹ “The Law of the Fang and the Cudgel” describes an earlier time, when revolution in Russia was still far off, as were the disturbances in Brisbane in early 1919, which would bring him to prominence and lead to his first deportation. It is an eloquent vignette from the Queensland outback which helps to explain his attitude to Australia and the British, and his belief that Australia needed a social revolution no less than his homeland.

Zuzenko enjoyed great renown as a raconteur, as may be seen from Konstantin Paustovskii’s portrait of him in his autobiographical *Story of a Life* (first published 1964).² Paustovskii was, in fact, indebted to him for the raw material of several of his early stories, and not only for the character of Captain Kravchenko in his novel of 1929, *The Gleaming Clouds*. Zuzenko had in his repertoire a great number of stories of his years in Australia, but committed very few of them to paper. Of “The Law of the Fang and the Cudgel” only a fragment—roughly one sixth of its total length—has appeared in print, in a version published in *Izvestiia* in 1935 by Aleksei Tolstoi, who heard it while a passenger on Captain Zuzenko’s ship, the *Smol’nyi*, during a voyage from Leningrad to London. Zuzenko’s story occupies two of the twenty-one pages of Tolstoi’s “Orpheus in the Underworld”.³ Since there is some degree of overlap, those pages of Tolstoi’s story need to be kept firmly in mind when considering “The Law...”.

To Russian readers, both stories have a certain novelty value by the very fact of showing a Russian presence in Australia at the time of World War I. Most visible in Queensland, it consisted partly of enterprising peasants and farmers like Lavrov, motivated by the lure of the “long rouble”; of others similarly motivated, like Zuzenko’s father-in-law Michael Rosenberg, a prospector from Barguzin in Siberia, who had heard of the gold to be mined in Australia; and of revolutionaries like the celebrated Fedor Sergeev (Tom Sergaev, Artem), who had escaped from prisons and penal colonies in Siberia and travelled east to take ship to Brisbane. Zuzenko himself, clearly a “political” and a revolutionary, had not taken the eastern route, though he claimed to have fled Russia under threat of imprisonment, and it is not altogether clear—he nowhere explains—why in 1911 his choice fell on Australia, or if, as the memoirs of Iurii Klimenchenko suggest, he was simply put ashore in Sydney and left behind by a skipper who wanted to get rid of a trouble-making subordinate.⁴ Whatever the precise circumstances, Australian government records show him becoming increasingly active in the community during the war, and Russian activists, IWW or not, were a source of growing concern, especially in the Queensland mines, where “The Law ...” is set. The correspondence of the Queensland Police in August and September 1917 contains several letters dealing with labour unrest at Mount Cuthbert, noting that most of the Russians there were IWW, and 70% of them supported the revolution in Russia.⁵

Of the two stories, “The Law of the Fang and the Cudgel” is the fuller version, from which it may be seen that, while the boxing episode has its own clear moral, this is given heightened emphasis by the addition of the murder episode featuring Lavrov.⁶ On British and Australian life “The Law ...” makes the same points as “Orpheus”.⁷ To the

narrator, “good old English custom”, bred into the working classes no less than their masters, is one of the most detestable features of a hostile society, in which radical change is overdue.

Zuzenko’s attitude to the working classes of Australia displays a certain ambivalence. On the one hand, his reports to the Executive Committee of the Comintern (ECCI) stress their revolutionary potential, favourably contrasted with the workers of the mother country. On the other, he finds British and Australian workers alike prone to a “slave” mentality, which seems to hold little promise for revolutionary action. His leading article in the first English-language issue of *Knowledge and Unity* sternly rebuked its worker readers for their inaction: “You have not been strong and alert in the past, comrades of ours. You have sat idle while oppression has stalked this sunny continent...”,⁸ and his frustration shows clearly in an article written soon after the rout of the URW in the streets of Brisbane, when he speaks of the “criminal inactivity” of the local workers.⁹

This latter view is dominant in “The Law...”. The narrator’s reference to the chorus of “Rule, Britannia”, *Britons never never never shall be slaves*, is laden with irony, and harks back to an article Zuzenko had published in English in 1922, in which he wrote, “Once I was in a British jail and heard the songs of the prisoners who sang that Britons never shall be slaves. A few hundred men without any will or even the appearance of men. To compare these even with animals would be to insult the animal.”¹⁰ Zuzenko seems to have established in his own mind a largely racial divide between British and Russian workers, in which the “slave mentality” sometimes attributed to the Russians becomes instead the property of the British.¹¹ For all the rousing songs affirming the

contrary, it is the British who seem to him more slave-like and less educated, in his own understanding of the word, than Russian workers. Worse, “Our British militant friends are too apathetic,” he is alleged to have declared in February 1919,¹² and “Britons never shall be Russians because they have no will, no backbone to fight their own battle to emancipation” (“Revolution”, *The Communist*, 18 August 1922, 1). And now in 1925 the concluding sentence of “The Law...” suggests that only the British are descended from the apes!

Zuzenko’s *Communist* article is in some ways a curious piece for the chosen medium, being less an exhortation to act than an attack, launched in apparent exasperation, on the supine Anglo-Australian worker from the commanding moral heights held by his Russian counterpart. As in his *Knowledge and Unity* articles, Zuzenko hectors his worker audience mercilessly, deploying unfavourable comparisons and rhetorical questions: “In Russian literature we have our satirist Gogol who laughed at the shams of Russian life through bitter tears. How many Gogols do you need, you Anglo-Saxon workers?” Australia’s trade unions, he says, are utterly ineffective, and individualism and individual opinions undermine any semblance of real unity. Again “old English custom”, which is pinpointed in “Orpheus” as a source of much evil, stands out clearly as an ironic refrain and a central preoccupation in both “The Law...” and the *Communist* article, where it helps to identify the author. In that article he wrote of “old English customs which are now rotten, existing for centuries without changes”. The pre-eminence of individualism receives further adverse comment in the version related by Aleksei Tolstoi: the Australian railway gangers, Tolstoi quotes Zuzenko as saying, are

“one hundred and twenty lone wolves”, to whom any notions of workers’ solidarity are alien (A. Tolstoi 108; Windle, “Orpheus” 101).

If Zuzenko’s clear separation of Australian and Russian workers seems to be founded on racial grounds, this may be understood as a reaction to the racist attitudes underlying Anglo-Saxon treatment of outsiders. Very early in his Australian career he had come up against a dislike of foreigners, and had never forgotten it, as may be seen in the novel by Iurii Klimenchenko *The Life and Adventures of Long Alek* (1975), in which the author recasts Zuzenko’s adventures into fiction, using Zuzenko himself as his primary source. In this novel, no sooner has “Chibisov” landed than he learns that Australians are wary of foreigners and believe that there are far too many Russian troublemakers in Brisbane.¹³ The xenophobia that Zuzenko encountered rankled deeply; in large part this is the narrator’s motive for fighting in “The Law...”, and the first point he makes to the work-gang when he has won the right to work with them: he is trying to teach them “civilised” behaviour.

Tolstoi’s “Orpheus” contains only a fragment of the longer story: the narrator’s encounter with a new work-gang, and the fist-fight into which he is provoked. The greater part of “The Law ...”, the parable of Lavrov, the meek, uncomplaining peasant and exemplar of the slave mentality who is able to overcome that mentality and rise above his surroundings, reborn as an “angry proletarian”, does not appear elsewhere.

The degree of “historicity” of Zuzenko’s story cannot be ascertained in full, but it is certain that the story has a firm basis in fact. The case of Lavrov is modelled on a very similar incident which took place in the same part of the world in August 1916, in closely comparable, though not identical, circumstances. Alick (Alec, Afanasy) Yakunin, a

smelter hand, killed his tormentor, John Turner, a New Zealander, by hitting him on the head with an iron bar. This happened not at a railway construction site at Mount Cuthbert, but one hundred kilometres to the south, at Rosebud copper mine and smelter.¹⁴ Yakunin was charged with wilful murder and brought before the Circuit Court in Cloncurry in October. He received a sentence of three years' hard labour for manslaughter, rather than murder, and served only two years at HM Penal Establishment, Stewart's Creek (Townsville).¹⁵

The court took account of Turner's provocative behaviour and repeated mockery of the defendant, on which grounds the verdict included the phrase "recommendation to mercy". It is known from the court records that Yakunin, whose spoken English was not very good, explained himself thus to the arresting constable: "He been call me bloody Russian fucking bastard, Chinese fucking whore, and make me wild. I hit him." In another interview with P.C. Bate, Yakunin cited the offending phrases as "bloody black bastard" and "bloody yellow bastard", of which the former is repeated in subsequent official correspondence discussing the case, such as Yakunin's naturalisation file. Some of the press reports, for example, in the Charters Towers *Northern Miner*, make mention of "strong provocation", and the Brisbane Russian newspaper *Rabochaia zhizn'* reported that Yakunin had spoken to his Russian workmates, who numbered about fifteen, of intimidation by the New Zealander.¹⁶ Yakunin did not, however, assert that Turner had threatened to kill him, as Zuzenko presents the case in his story. The racial slurs are curious in the light of the fact that Turner himself is described as "coloured"¹⁷ and was known to his workmates as "Maori Jack".

As for Yakunin's being tempered by the experience and becoming an angry, reformed proletarian, eager to do his bit in the revolutionary struggle, this is not confirmed in the documentary records. It is true that his first application for naturalisation, in 1929, was blocked by the redoubtable H. E. Jones, the long-serving Director of the Investigation Branch of the Attorney-General's Department, who noted Yakunin's connections with known Communists and his efforts to conceal his prison sentence. Just as he had deplored Zuzenko's "dangerous ideas and practices" when pressing for his deportation in 1919 and 1922, so now he describes Yakunin as "a dangerous type of man". However, by 1933 it was accepted that Yakunin had "severed all connections" with his Communist friends and been "of very good behaviour". He remained in Australia until his death in the 1950s and does not appear to have been involved in any subversive or seditious activities.¹⁸

The true extent of Zuzenko's personal involvement in the case, or of his acquaintance with Yakunin, is difficult to establish with certainty. He was not called as a witness, as he states in his story of Lavrov. However, he was certainly privy to details which did not figure in the sparse press coverage, and he makes use of these.¹⁹ At the same time it is clear that he adapts his raw material at points when he feels this serves his ideological purpose, and adds lurid detail at others (such as the victim's wounds),²⁰ for the sake of the story, just as he was wont to do in his oral story-telling. In a sense the veracity of the details is not of central importance. Zuzenko's purpose is didactic, and to him it was natural that he should tailor real events to suit his message, to persuade his readers of what to him were elementary truths, and to convey what he saw as the iniquitous essence of "British" ways. In support of his argument, he is able to furnish

authentic particulars, not only of the crime: there is mention of Sergeev and his newspaper, though without its title (*Izvestiia Soiuza russkikh emigrantov* in 1915; *Rabochaia zhizn'* in 1916), and of the URW, of which Zuzenko was secretary in 1918-1919. Details of this kind are absent from Tolstoi's second-hand version, which in other respects accurately reflects the relevant passages of "The Law..."

The phrase "the storms of 1918" refers to the events in Queensland in that year, when sporadic industrial strife and political demonstrations increased in frequency, and the URW was deeply involved. Zuzenko was the organiser of a strike in the cane-fields near Ingham, but moved to Brisbane in August while it was still in progress, to take on new responsibilities in the URW. The Commonwealth government was greatly perturbed by developments in Queensland, and consideration was being given to the deportation of the leading Russian activists, Zuzenko above all, even before 1918 was out. The year 1919 was to begin in even stormier fashion: after large-scale demonstrations and clashes in the streets in the first months of the year the threat of deportation became a reality.

The narrator locates his story in time by reference to known events, but it needs to be borne in mind that authorial licence may be at work here, or that Zuzenko may simply have forgotten the dates, since the New Zealander's violent death occurred a year later. When the narrator meets Lavrov the Dardanelles campaign is in progress and the narrator is waiting for the sugar-cane harvest to begin in the coastal regions of Queensland. The year is therefore 1915, most likely May, as the first landings took place on 25 April and the cane-cutting season begins in June. "About nine years ago" would therefore place the date of writing in 1924, or a little later if we recall the date of the Yakunin case. In early 1924 Zuzenko was working as a journalist in Moscow for the water transport workers'

union, writing articles for *Na vakhte*, but this piece was evidently not one of them. By the end of that year, Zuzenko had left the newspaper and become the captain of an ocean-going merchantman. His last known contribution to *Na vakhte*, an account of the hardships of working-class life in Hamburg and Edinburgh, was written in late 1924 when he was in command of the *Vladimir Rusanov*.²¹

Both as a journalist and a propagandist, Zuzenko was a skilled writer, as his vivid reports to the ECCI and many of his press articles demonstrate. The full vigour and rich colloquial flavour of his prose may not emerge clearly in English translation, in which some possibly anachronistic phrasing has been deployed in the attempt to convey its energy. Some, at least, of its essential ingredients will remain apparent, however. He presents his material with feeling, in polemical form, as a dialogue with his reader, whom he addresses in the familiar second person *ty* and goads into giving the responses he wants, so that he can press home his verbal assault. This is most apparent in the striking phrases of the very first paragraph, which is marked for deletion from the typescript; it seems that the author himself, on reflection, thought that he had over-egged his anti-clerical pudding. Further on, the narrator's contempt for racist attitudes is matched only by his plainly stated hostility to religion: the "new proletarian good book", he tells Lavrov, is Socialism, which "teaches you never ever to forgive your enemies".²²

In this story the language at key points in the dialogue with the Australian workers bears clear markers of its English origin: for example, *krovavyi kitaets* (bloody Chinaman),²³ *kholodnye nogi* (cold feet); and the insult *nezakonorozhdennyi* (bastard). Such un-Russian expressions serve as a distancing device, making clear the gulf between these workers and the narrator's own position as a Russian in this alien environment.

These aside, however, it is easy to forget that part of the dialogue was originally in English, and in back-translating one can only hazard a guess at what English words might have been used where Zuzenko has, for example, *dolgoviazhi varvar*. The version chosen, “long-legged wog”, is this translator’s best guess, made in the knowledge that there may be other possibilities, though these are by no means obvious.

The Russian text on which the translation is based is a photocopy of the typescript in the possession of Ms Ksenia Aleksandrovna Zuzenko. Another copy is held in the Poole-Fried Collection at the University of Queensland’s Fryer Library.²⁴ I am grateful to Ms Zuzenko for the opportunity to view the original typescript, and for permission to publish this translation.

The Law of the Fang and the Cudgel²⁵

A tale of a man of experience

by A. M. Zuzenko

Existence determines consciousness... A fine phrase, a splendid phrase, I’d say, but you turn it into some kind of jelly. According to your theory everything in life is predetermined by the laws of evolution. No, my great seraphic angel, you’d do better to give your blasted fatalism away to the bible-bashers to keep in perpetuity and not try to

make out that it's Marxism, not even to some wet-behind-the-ears Komsomol kid. You'd be skinned alive in no time... On the basis of a whole heap of examples I've arrived at the conviction that human life is one revolution after another, starting from the first revolution—birth... And no, don't start shoving Chekhov at me!²⁶ His little men in boxes are as rare as pineapple plants in Chukhloma.²⁷ Eunuchs aren't born, my old crony, they're made, and only by forcing nature, by going violently against it. Chekhov's men in boxes are the product of a heartless kind of surgery... But that's enough of that...

Has it ever happened that you've known somebody for years, some Maximov or Stepanov, and had a clear idea of him, and then some unusual event has shown him up in a completely different light and completely transformed him? All your shared past is over and done. Want an example? Here's one.

About nine years ago my wanderings took me into the grim and arid desert parts of central Australia, to the Cuthbert mountains.²⁸ Although I loathed working with a pick and shovel, I had to find a job in a work-gang laying a spur line from the Cloncurry-Mount Cuthbert railway. It isn't enough to get a note from the engineer and have the foreman accept you and issue your tools and for you to pitch your tent by some dry creek bed; you still have to earn the right to work with the gang itself, and this is how you do it.

You go out to work the first day, early in the morning; you struggle like some chain-gang convict to get into the rhythm, and have to listen to your workmates unceremoniously sizing you up, right up to the lunch break. At lunchtime, while you force a piece of bread down your dry throat, they ask your name, and when they hear that it's Alek they immediately decide to call you Joe and ask what country you come from. Russia ... "Where in hell don't they bring these foreigners in from?" you hear around you.

“White people, hundreds of them, are wandering all over Australia, carrying their tents with them, looking for a job, and some Chinaman like this one,” the speaker nods at me, “somehow finds one right away.” All through the lunch break the whole gang curses the “bloody” Russians and all the other foreigners who come here to plunder “our Australia”. “In comes some long-legged wog like him there (nod in my direction), makes a few hundred quid and goes off home to Russia or Italy with it, to live in clover at the expense of poor plundered Australia...” You keep quiet, seething with rage and trying to reply only to questions directed at you personally. They pick on you more and more, and take your silence for cowardice. After lunch your neighbours curse the shovels they have to use, the heat of the day, the stones in the soil, and the bloody Chinamen—all in the crudest terms. You sense that all their choice words are aimed at you, that the shovels and the heat aren’t to blame: *you* are, you the wog who wasn’t good enough to be born in England or democratic Australia but have the gall to try and worm your way into White society... (To the English and Australians only Anglo-Saxons are white.)

An hour or so after lunch the burliest tough in the gang starts swearing at you for something you haven’t done, and when you try to explain he calls you a Chinaman and a bastard... The whole gang down tools and wait to see how the contemptible foreigner will react to the insult. To an Anglo-Saxon, “bastard” is the worst of insults... They form a circle like a pack of wolves round two of their number fighting to lead the pack.²⁹

With dignity you interrupt the troublemaker’s rant, throw your jacket on the ground, and signal to him to step aside, ready to “take from him according to his ability and give according to his needs”, as the communist slogan runs.

The fight takes place right alongside the work site, and the whole gang follow every movement with intense interest. When you knock him down (and my fights never ended any other way) you wait while somebody counts to ten, and if he hasn't got up you are declared the winner.

You turn a face contorted with rage to the crowd and ask, "Who's next?", and after a minute of pregnant silence, you add, "I'll teach any one of you savages how a civilised man ought to treat a foreigner."

Yes, don't give me that astonished look; don't twist your features into that frightened scowl. I'm not telling you anything unusual. In the English-speaking countries, they have only one law in force everywhere: *the Law of the Fang and the Cudgel*.

Only when you've bared your fangs to the crowd, like an animal, do they begin to respect you for your strength, as a well-formed combination of muscles. You have won the right to work!

In the case I'm telling you about, on my first day I had to earn respect with my fists, and the right to criticise the trade unions and their craft-union propaganda,³⁰ with two fights in one day, against zealous supporters of old English custom, held sacred by all. Only after that could I take my place firmly in the gang until the start of the cane-cutting season, the start of the work I loved best...

I'd been working in the gang nearly three months when I found out that in a neighbouring gang, whose camp was four miles from ours, there was another Russian working.

To a swagman who sometimes went months without hearing anyone speaking Russian, an event like a meeting with another Russian was a real pleasure. Before lunch

the next Sunday, after I'd washed my work shirt and all my things, I set out with long strides and in an hour I'd covered the distance separating me from my fellow-countryman.

Lavrov—that was his name—had pitched his tent on the slope of a low rise, two minutes' walk from the camp. He greeted me warmly, thanked me several times for the Russian newspapers I'd brought, asked about the war and the successes of the Russian army and of the allies, wished “our” side success in capturing Constantinople, and when I expressed my hope that all the belligerents would be beaten in the name of the world revolution he hastily agreed with me, so as not to offend his guest, but I could see that he was actually disappointed. Sitting with him in his tent until evening, I learned that he'd been torn away by poverty from his home village in the province of Penza, had made his way to Siberia, worked on the railway there, and gone on to Harbin and from there to Australia, and all the time remained the same peasant that he'd been in his Penza village³¹... His peasant outlook extended no further than a dream of making a thousand roubles in order to be able to set himself up on a big farm back in Penza. Why didn't he subscribe to a newspaper from Brisbane? He couldn't read English, and the Russian paper was too expensive, and he didn't know the address, and he didn't have time to read it anyway. And you don't feel like reading a paper when you get home from work so worn out you have spasms in your arms and legs... No, mate, the way they work here's not like it is in Russia... In Russia they don't work; they take it easy.

The next Sunday he spent the whole day at my camp. He scolded me in a friendly way for being so free with my money, and said I wouldn't be leaving Australia any time soon if I kept up such a grand style.

“What do you need butter for? It’s mostly water, isn’t it? And cheese—it all comes from grass, doesn’t it? You do need bread, and meat’s no bad thing, but best of all buy some cheap bones and make yourself a good wholesome broth!”

I could see that, although meat was “no bad thing”, out of sheer peasant stinginess he didn’t allow himself the luxury. I was stunned when he handed me two shillings as he was leaving and asked me to take out a subscription from Brisbane for the Russian newspaper. “I wonder who runs it now. Does Sergeev publish it?³² I’ve met him. He’s a decent enough fellow.”

The English workers who came to us from the gang Lavrov worked in had a very low opinion of him: no brain... cold feet ... no guts ... not right in the head...

It would have been a bit awkward for me to raise with him the subject of his job and the attitude of the gang to him. I waited for him to bring it up himself. Only when I’d known him nearly two months did he talk about it and mention how he wished he could change jobs. Could he come and work with me?

I asked him, “Is it true that you’ve sunk to the position of a slave to some New Zealander? Is it true they call you every name under the sun and you just give them a stupid smile, and that the New Zealander has hit you several times and all you do is run away in shame? Is it true things have got so bad that when you go out to the site in the morning and come back in the evening this New Zealander loads you up with all his tools as if you were some kind of pack animal, and you don’t object?”

“Yes, that’s all true, but what can you do?” He has a very good job and gets a shilling more than the navvies who do the shovelling. His team lays the sleepers and rails. He’d never want to leave, and he has a good foreman and everything, but that damned

New Zealander spoils it all... Even though in my gang they pay a shilling less he'd be glad to move over and work with me. It's all right for me to talk about looking after myself. Look at the height of you, and besides you've learned all about English boxing, so the English are scared to touch you, but he can't fight, doesn't like it, and isn't all that strong. So to put it in a nutshell, turn away from evil and do good, like it says in the Good Book.

I was out of sorts that day, even without that pathetic little man... As if I'd take him on for any sort of job, standing up or lying down! I let fly with a thunderous speech:

Good Book! You cabbage-head! Don't you know we have our own new proletarian good book? It's called Socialism, and it teaches you never ever to forgive your enemies! If others won't protect you, learn to hit back yourself. You're thirty-four and you act like a teenager! It's high time you realised that you're not the only person on the planet and that by picking on a stupid dummy like you your bully is practising finding other scared little no-hopers to pick on. Has it occurred to you that your New Zealander has developed a taste for bullying weaker souls, and after you've left he'll make life hell for a whole lot more, before he comes up against some sinner like me? You say I've learned to box, so I don't have to be afraid. Boxing's got nothing to do with it. Even if the strongest man in the world tried to trample over me I'd take him down in two seconds. I'd grab an axe, a revolver or a shotgun, seize the devil by the horns and teach him to bully others for ever after. You know the saying "run with the wolf-pack and you'll learn to howl"? So howl like a wolf when you're among them, bite and tear with your fangs if they attack you, and if you haven't got the strength or the courage then get away from here to the back of beyond. You want to join the gang I'm in, but in a fortnight I'm

leaving for the cane-fields. When I'm gone the same old business as you had in the old team will start again. Some other New Zealander or Irishman will come along and pick on you, and force you to either leave or fight...

You want my advice? Give your notice tomorrow and clear out of Queensland as far as you can, off to somewhere in Western Australia, and find a job there. Say as little as possible, keep a permanent scowl on your face, and if anybody has a go at you, say nothing but threaten him with your shovel, or reach for your pocket as if you had a knife in it. That way they'll be afraid of you, and you might be able to work a bit longer... What else to advise a gormless bugger like you I really can't think. It hurts just to look at you; it fills a person with pity and rage. I'll tell you one thing though: clear off out of Queensland, or else the word about you will spread with the swagmen from one end of the state to the other...

Afterwards I was sorry I'd been so hard on him... He went away looking down-in-the-mouth and kind of grey.

The next day after lunch—it was a Monday—we see this man on horseback galloping as hard as he can. Without dismounting he asked if we had a policeman there. No, we said, the police post's further on, about seven miles away. What's up? we asked. Why do you need a policeman? Bad news, he said. The Russian who works in our gang killed a New Zealander outright, at lunchtime, and wounded the Scotsman who was sitting next to him.

That day the heat was overpowering; I was streaming with sweat all day, but now my blood ran cold. What an idiot I'd been! I walked off to one side, not wanting to hear the details.

Lavrov was brought to trial in Cloncurry and I was called as a witness. I testified that he was with me the day before the murder. Before the jury there unfolded a picture of the most revolting mistreatment of a frightened, persecuted foreigner. For six months the New Zealander never missed an opportunity to have his fun at the expense of Lavrov, who always let him do what he wanted. Often the New Zealander hit him, and that's to say nothing about the verbal abuse. He called Lavrov every name there is in a swagman's filthy language. On the day of the murder, the foreman testified, the New Zealander didn't just load all his tools onto him, but swore at him all the way to the site. When the foreman tried to reason with him, he answered angrily, "I hate the grovelling creature's guts and today I'm going to kill him—I'll be damned if I don't!" At lunchtime he was sitting next to his friend the Scotsman and ordered Lavrov to go back to the camp to fetch his tobacco. Lavrov refused. "All right then, you dog of a Chinaman. Let me just finish my lunch and I'll thrash the life clean out of you!" Lavrov walked off without a word, came back with a crowbar and with one blow from behind split his head in two down to the neck. He brought it down so hard the crowbar caught the Scotsman as well and injured him badly.

All the witnesses, even the injured Scotsman, testified in favour of the accused. Everybody who was there—not only me—was quite sure he'd be acquitted. The jury's verdict was, "Guilty of murder in self-defence". The judge ruled otherwise.

You have to see a British court in all its splendour and hear its wise decisions to understand the power, the dead hand, of old English custom, which has entered their flesh and blood and long since decayed, infecting all of life. It has raised up everything base, deceitful and vile into an ideal, and crushes, stifles and roots out of the living soil

everything that is new and fresh, everything that might free men from their chains, on the pretext that everything that is new conflicts with “our good old English custom”.

It’s only by virtue of that shabby, musty old idol, “old English custom” that you sit in court and marvel at a puffed-up, shaven, bulldog-like toad in a black robe with wide sleeves, with a wig on his head. Looking at this toad, you can’t help expecting that a turkey’s tail will appear behind the back of his chair, that the bulldog muzzle will start drooling and the fatuous bristling figure will turkey-gobble ... You’re a Russian wog and that’s why you have thoughts like that!

From a handful of Englishmen any one chosen at random, having heard a judge sentence a poor man to six months in jail “for being unemployed”—on the basis of a law from the days of Richard the Lion Heart—will turn to you with delight written all over his face, and declare with deep conviction that “there’s no court in the world better or more humane than an English court, and that’s only because it’s based on the law of the holy scriptures: an eye for an eye, a tooth for a tooth.”

In the trial of Lavrov, the judge agreed with the jury that the murder was provoked by the victim and that the accused might be let off, but he added that a year or so ago Lavrov had been drunk and disorderly in Cloncurry, and had even been arrested and fined by the police.

“That’s why I’m giving you two years’ imprisonment, as a scoundrel with criminal habits.”

Not the law, not an edict from his majesty the king, but a stupid dressed-up puppet with a sadistic streak “gives” people prison terms. Lavrov didn’t even say “Thank you, your worship,” but the judge didn’t increase his sentence for that breach of “good

old English custom”. He was just a wog who wasn’t familiar with the customs of the Britons, who *never never never shall be slaves*.³³

The year 1917 arrived, the year of the great proletarian turn from the age-old beaten track of slavery for the workers, the year of the birth of the hopes and aspirations of the working class throughout the world for a new fraternal order that was near. The waves of the Russian revolution reached out and rocked Australia. Even there there was a storm—call it a storm in a tea-cup, if you like. It doesn’t matter. What matters most is that the foundations of the ancient leviathan on which the life of Britain and its colonies is based, “good old English custom”, were shaken.

During the storms of 1918, at the height of the period of reappraisal of old values, after a meeting of the Union of Russian Workers in Australia (in Brisbane) which had dragged on late into the evening, I met Lavrov again. I only recognised him when he gave me his broad, good-natured smile. He’d come out of prison only a fortnight earlier, released with remission for good conduct and his work in the prison bakery. He thanked me for the brochures and newspapers that the Union had sent to him in prison.³⁴

As I talked with him I felt awful. How could the Lavrov I knew feel any friendship for the man who hadn’t held him back from that dreadful act? How often in the dead of the prison night he must have cursed my very name!

I heaved a sigh of relief when Lavrov took his leave and made for the exit from the meeting room, but then he turned and came back, gave me his hand and said, “I forgot to thank you, my friend ...” What for? “For your ... your advice. Remember? If they won’t let me go back to Soviet Russia soon,³⁵ I’ll work here for a while, but if some rat

lays a finger on me...” His eyes blazed with a gloomy light. “That’ll be it! I know what I’m doing! Even if it means jail or a death sentence!”

The peasant Lavrov from the Mount Cuthbert railway line was no more. Before me stood a stern-faced, angry proletarian, reforged in the furnace of that old English custom, handed down by pirates from their ancestors the apes, the *Law of the Fang and the Cudgel*.

¹ See Kevin Windle, “Round the World for the Revolution: A Bolshevik agent’s mission to Australia 1920-22 and his interrogation by Scotland Yard”, *Revolutionary Russia*, Vol. 17, No. 2, December 2004, 90-118; Kevin Windle, “ ‘The Achilles Heel of British Imperialism’: A Comintern agent reports on his mission to Australia 1920-1922. An annotated translation”, *Australian Slavonic and East European Studies*, 2004, Vol. 18, Nos. 1-2, 143-76; Kevin Windle, “Orpheus Down Under: Fragments by A. N. Tolstoi on the career of Captain Zuzenko. Translation and commentary”, *Slavonica*, Vol. 12, No. 2, November 2006, 91-105.

² Konstantin Paustovskii, *Povest’ o zhizni* (Moscow: Sovetskaia Rossiia, 1966). See Kevin Windle, “Aleksandr Zuzenko i avstraliiskaia tema v sovetskoi literature”, *Studia Rossica Posnaniensia*, XXXII, 2005, 11-20.

³ A. N. Tolstoi, “Orfei v adu”, *Polnoe sobranie sochinenii* (Moscow: Gosudarstvennoe izdatel’stvo khudozhestvennoi literatury), vol. 13 (1949), 99-120. The relevant fragments are translated in Windle, “Orpheus”. Tolstoi did not name the captain or his ship.

⁴ Iurii Klimenchenko, *Korabl’ idet dal’she* (Leningrad: Sovetskii pisatel’, 1973), 76-77. Klimenchenko reports hearing this version from a shipmate, who presumably heard it from Zuzenko himself or from a mutual acquaintance. Hearsay accounts of this nature in Klimenchenko’s memoirs are not necessarily reliable. Zuzenko’s own words in his “Autobiography”, “perebralsia v Avstraliuu”, indicate that he travelled to Australia willingly. See A. M. Zuzenko, “Avtobiografiia”. I am grateful to Ksenia Alekandrovna Zuzenko for access to this unpublished document.

⁵ Queensland State Archives (QSA): 16865 General Correspondence, police; A/64234; RSI 13214/4/429.

⁶ The term “addition” may of course be inexact. It is highly likely that Zuzenko conceived the story with two components, and that Tolstoi heard only the first, which is in effect an introduction to the longer Lavrov story.

⁷ Despite their Australian setting, in their account of working-class life both versions have affinities with some of the stories of Maxim Gorky, whom Zuzenko admired.

⁸ “To Our Australian Comrades”, *Knowledge and Unity*, 31 December 1918, 1. The article is signed “Civa Rosenberg, Editress”. Zuzenko was banned from publishing at the time, and regularly used the disguise of his fiancée’s signature.

⁹ *Nabat*, 6 August 1919, 1. Untitled leading article, signed “Rossiiskii rabochii” [A Russian Worker]. Internal evidence makes clear that the writer is Zuzenko (not Hermann Bykov, as suggested in Windle, “Orpheus”, 94), and that it was written in the weeks following the March disturbances, before his deportation in April. See Kevin Windle, “*Nabat* and its Editors: the 1919 swansong of the Brisbane Russian Socialist Press”, *Australian Slavonic and East European Studies*, 2007, Vol. 21, Nos. 1-2, 143-63.

¹⁰ “Revolution – A Russian’s Opinion”, *The Communist*, 18 August 1922, 1. The article is unsigned but the content and style leave little doubt as to the identity of its author, who had been arrested in Melbourne a week earlier and was awaiting deportation for the second time. “Rule, Britannia” was popular with patriotic returned soldiers, who liked to use it to drown out the revolutionary songs of the despised foreigners. See Raymond Evans, *The Red Flag Riots: A Study of Intolerance* (St Lucia: University of Queensland Press, 1988), 37, 64, 145. Zuzenko would therefore have had added reason for finding it objectionable.

¹¹ On the Russian “slave mentality”, see e.g. Daniel Rancour-Laferriere, *The Slave Soul of Russia: Moral Masochism and the Cult of Suffering* (New York: New York University Press, 1995), in which Dostoevskii, Lev Tolstoi, Dmitrii Merezhkovskii and others are cited to demonstrate the “slave soul”; also Vasilii Grossman, *Vse techet* (Frankfurt/Main: Posev, 1970), especially Chapter 22. Anna Politkovskaya speaks of a ‘serf-like psychology’ in *A Russian Diary* (London: Harvill Secker, 2007), trans. by Arch Tait.

¹² National Library of Australia: Papers of William Morris Hughes; Summary of Communism, 16/8/1922; Alexander Michael Zuzenko or Soosenko alias Matulichenko, by H. E. Jones, Director, Investigation Branch of Attorney-General’s Department; MS1538, Series 21.

¹³ Iurii Klimenchenko, *Zhizn’ i prikliucheniia Long Aleka* (Leningrad: Lenizdat, 1975), 229-30.

¹⁴ Rosebud mine, abandoned not many years after these events, was situated at Bulonga, ten kilometres south of Mary Kathleen (also later abandoned), half way between Cloncurry and Mount Isa. See the map at http://www.mountisa.biz/download/Fountain_Springs_Mudmap.pdf (accessed 4 June 2007).

¹⁵ QSA: Supreme Court, Northern District, Townsville; 7833 Criminal Files, depositions; ID 276462, A/18392, microfilm reel 3897 (1916); National Archives of Australia (NAA): Department of Immigration; Application for Naturalisation of Yakunin, Afanasy; W. Ryan to Inspector, Investigation Branch, Federal Attorney-General's Department, Brisbane, 3/12/1929; A446 (2004/00560450), 1955/50385.

¹⁶ "Cloncurry Notes", *Northern Miner*, 23 October 1916, 6. *Rabochaia zhizn'* reported this case on 12 September (p. 3) and 15 November 1916 (p. 2), saying incorrectly that Yakunin 'threw' a crowbar at his victim, and that this occurred on a railway. I am grateful to Dr Elena Govor for the last two references, and for other valuable assistance.

¹⁷ QSA: Depositions of P.C. Bate and James McRae; ID 276462, A/18392; QSA: Queensland Police Department, O'Connor to Commissioner of Police, Brisbane, 23 Aug. 1916; 4190 Murder Files (administrative); ID 666009, A/49739. On the use of "Chinese" and "Chinaman", see note 23 below.

¹⁸ NAA: Yakunin naturalisation application; A446 (2004/00560450), 1955/50385.

¹⁹ Zuzenko knows, for example, that the end of Yakunin's iron bar caught the right cheek and nose of the man seated on Turner's left, Thomas Taylor, and briefly stunned him, as Taylor testified in court; QSA: ID 276462, A/18392.

²⁰ Fatal though Turner's injuries were, they were visually less appalling than in Zuzenko's story, and death was not instant. He died some nine hours later of a cerebral haemorrhage. QSA: Testimony of Dr Roderick MacLennan, Criminal files, depositions; ID 276462, A/18392.

²¹ Kapitan dal'nego plavaniia A. M. Zuzenko, "Kak zhivet zagranitsa: Putevye nabroski (ot nashego korrespondenta)", *Na vakhte*, No. 279, 2, Sat. 6 December 1924.

²² On Zuzenko's attitude to religion, see his article "Zhil li Khristos?", *Gudok*, 25 December 1923; on Mikhail Bulgakov's use of this article in the opening chapter of *The Master and Margarita*, see Kevin Windle, "Zhurnal'ist i revoliutsioner na trekh kontinentakh: A. M. Zuzenko", *Tynianovskii sbornik*, No. 12, 2006, 452-468. Zuzenko was an admirer of the scholar Nikolai Aleksandrovich Morozov, a one-time *narodnik*, whose anti-religious books he treasured. In 1927 he wrote to Morozov to praise his *Khristos*, and

a warm friendship developed. Archive of the Russian Academy of Sciences: *Fond 543, Opis´ 4, Delo 695*, Zuzenko, Aleksandr Mikhailovich, kapitan dal´nego plavaniia, to Morozov, <http://www.ras.ru/MArchive/pageimages/543/4> (accessed 31 January 2007).

²³ Zuzenko’s widow Civa, interviewed in 1990 by Eric Fried, recalled that in Australia her husband was regularly called a “Chinaman”, and the contexts in which this word appears suggest that it was a generalised derogatory term for a foreigner. Civa cited the word in English. See Windle, “Orpheus”, 95. I am grateful to Eric Fried for kindly providing the video-recording of that interview.

²⁴ UQFL 336, Box 8, Folder 10 “Zuzenko”.

²⁵ The typescript bore a different title, which has been deleted and replaced by hand with “Zakon klyka i dubiny”. The deleted title reads “Kak pererozhdaitsia liudi” (How People Are Reborn). The other major hand-made deletion removes the entire first paragraph, which remains legible, however, and is included here.

²⁶ Zuzenko is referring to Chekhov’s well-known story “Chelovek v futliare” (The Man in the Case, 1898).

²⁷ Chukhloma: a small town in the province of Kostroma, north-east of Moscow.

²⁸ Central Australia, ... Cuthbert mountains (as given; *k goram Kasberta*): it is clear that Zuzenko is referring to the hills in the area of Mount Cuthbert, in Queensland’s north-western mining district. For help with geographical matters I am indebted to my colleague Dr Marian Hill.

²⁹ This sentence is added by hand to the typescript.

³⁰ In this period of his life Zuzenko was an active supporter of the IWW and viewed Australian trade unions as essentially bourgeois. He would later agitate for the One Big Union Propaganda League (OBUPL).

³¹ As a byword in rural backwardness, Zuzenko uses “in his native Puzanovka”; an approximate English equivalent to the name might be “Bellythorpe”.

³² The reference is to Fedor Andreevich Sergeev (Artem), the well-known revolutionary, in Queensland from 1911 to 1917; later a member of Lenin’s Central Committee and leading Bolshevik until his accidental death in 1921. On his Russian newspapers, see above.

³³ See note 10 above on “Rule, Britannia” and Zuzenko’s particular aversion to it.

³⁴ In late 1918 Zuzenko was secretary of the Union of Russian Workers, which had begun life in 1911 as the Union of Russian Emigrants and been politicised by Sergeev. He was also editing *Znanie i edinenie*, which at the end of the year became the English-language *Knowledge and Unity*.

³⁵ After the 1917 revolution, the Australian government took steps to prevent Russian revolutionaries in Australia returning home. The Bolshevik consul Peter Simonoff (Petr Simonov) campaigned against this policy.